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THE COPTIC MS. OR 7023 (PARTLY, LAYTON 158)

An Assessment of its Structure and Value

Ms Or 7023 contains the only extant copy of the Coptic version of the *Apocalypse of Paul*. In spite of its quality and interest for the reconstruction of the primitive text, there seems to be consensus among scholars in considering our text a rather amplifying or inferior version of *ApPaul*. This erroneous view is due to the numerous and important errors in Budge's *editio princeps*, which gives both distorted impression of the text's length and an incorrect assessment of the number and extension of internal *lacunae*. On the basis of a codicological analysis of Ms Or 7023, the present article shows that, excluding the missing first quaternion, the ms only has a single lacuna of one folio.

Ms Or 7023 (partly, Layton 158¹) belongs to a group of fifteen manuscripts that Budge, Rustafjaell and Nahman purchased for the British Museum between 1907 and 1909². When Budge first edited the ms in 1915, in his famous *Miscellaneous Texts of Upper Egypt*³, the parchment codex still preserved the ancient leather cover with geometrical tooling and consisted of 37 parchment folios⁴. To these, however, we should still add other four parchment folios belonging to ms Or 6806A, which originally belonged to the same codex but the editor mistakenly published separately. As a result, both mss even today are bound in two different volumes⁵.

The high interest of ms Or 7023 is due to the fact that, as far as I know, it includes the only extant exemplar of the Coptic version of the *Apocalypse of Paul* (*ApPaul*), a text that, in one of the numerous Latin versions, was plausibly known to Dante and inspired many a motif of his *Inferno*⁶. In spite of being, next to the Latin version, the most important witness for the *ApPaul*, the Coptic text has received virtually no atten-

¹ B. LAYTON, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906*, London, 1987, p. 186 (= LAYTON, *Catalogue*).

² According to the more precise information provided by LAYTON, *Catalogue*, p. 134, ms Or 7023 was purchased by Maurice Nahman on June 15th 1909 from Abd en Nur Gubrial of Qena, Egypt.

³ E.A.W. BUDGE, *Miscellaneous texts in the dialect of Upper Egypt. Edited with English translations*, London, 1915, p. 534-574; 1043-1084 (= BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*).

⁴ An illustration of the cover in BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*, xi.

⁵ Or. 6806A, consisting of four parchment folios, should be placed immediately after the first quire of Or. 7023 (ff. 1-7b). See *infra*.

⁶ See T. SILVERSTEIN, *Did Dante know of the Vision of St Paul?*, in *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 19 (1937), p. 231-247.



tion during the last 85 years. This is partly due to the wrong widespread opinion that the Coptic account presents an inferior or expanding version of the *ApPaul*⁷.

As a matter of fact, this incorrect view arises from the numerous and important errors in Budge's *editio princeps*, which give a distorted impression of the text's length and the number and extension of internal *lacunae*. In an attempt of eradicating this gratuitous opinion, the present paper provides an analysis of the manuscript's structure that corrects the confusing or erroneous statements by Budge and assesses the intrinsic value of its testimony. This study lays the basis on which a future textual analysis of the Coptic version and its comparison with the Latin, Greek, Syrian and Armenian will show that, as Casey and Silverstein already hinted at⁸, the Coptic text is to be reckoned among the best and most interesting testimonies of the *ApPaul*.

1. Codicological Description Ms Or 7023 (partly, Layton 158)

Date and Copyist. On f. 37^v the ms includes two colophons. The first (colophon A), written in Coptic, was included in Budge's edition and provides general information about the donation of the ms by a certain Psate, native of the town of **ⲧⲙⲉⲕⲣⲁ** (Damqariya) in the nome of Armant⁹. It is the second colophon (B), written in Greek and omitted by Budge's edition and translation, that provides more important information concerning both copyist and date of copy.

Budge dates the ms approximately to the second half of the 10th century, although his opinion is based on a dubious reading of colophon B,

⁷ So M. ERBETTA, *Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento* III. *Lettere e Apocalissi*, Milano, 1983, p. 356: '... il copto inoltre con un tenore peraltro inferiore al sirio (...) Il copto inoltre è molto trasformato'; H. DUENSING and A. DE SANTOS OTERO, *Apocalypse of Paul*, in *New testament Apocrypha*, Cambridge / Luisville, 1992, II, p. 713; J.K. ELLIOT, *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Literature in an English Translation*, Oxford, 1993, p. 618.

⁸ R.P. CASEY, *The Apocalypse of Paul*, in *JThS*, 34 (1933), p. 1-32; Th. SILVERSTEIN, *Visio sancti Pauli*, London, 1935, p. 20, 98 note 4; *idem*, *The Date of the Apocalypse of Paul*, in *Medieval Studies*, 24 (1962), p. 335-348. Both scholars relate the Coptic version of the apocalypse to the Greek original written in the 3rd century, placing its composition between this *terminus post quem* and the Tarsus-Text written in the 5th century. Furthermore C. CAROZZI, *Eschatologie et au-delà. Recherches sur l'Apocalypse de Paul*, Aix-en-Provence, 1994, shows an interest in the Coptic version and establishes a timely comparison with the other recensions.

⁹ For the toponym, cf. CRUM in H.E. WINLOCK, W.E. CRUM, H.G. EVELYN WHITE, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, 2 vols, New York, 1926, I, p. 122. Cf. also S. TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, Wiesbaden, 1984, II, p. 866-868 (= TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*).



namely the combination of two partial dates: the first letter of a date according to the Era of the Hijra ($\tau = 300$) and the remaining portion of the first letter of a date according to the Era of the Martyrs ($\psi' = 700$)¹⁰.

According to Van Lantschoot, who corrects Budge, the ms can be dated, with reservations, to the year AD 999, although his reading of the date contradicts his assumption. In point of fact, although he gives the year 389 according to the Era of the Hijra (999), his transcription of the Greek colophon B inconsistently reads $\tau\mu\theta$ (349), and this corresponds to AD 960 rather than 999.

Finally, Layton reads the date either as $\tau\pi\theta$ (389) or as $\tau\ \varepsilon$ (395), respectively, since he accepts Van Lantschoot hypothetical dating (AD 999) but also adds the year 1004 as a possible date of composition.

However, taking into account both the contents of this colophon¹¹ and the possibility of reading its date as 349 ($\tau\mu\theta$) in the Era of Hijra, the year AD 960 seems to me more likely¹². Ioseph, the son of Sisinnios in Esna, copied the manuscript.

Composition. The ms measures ca. 320 x ca. 240mm¹³ and consists today of 38 parchment folios, paper leaves at the beginning and end excluded¹⁴. F. 38 is an extraneous parchment folio added at a later date.

The writing is disposed in two columns and the lines oscillate between 23 and 29. The Coptic pagination, running from $\bar{\alpha}$ to $[\bar{\iota}\bar{\alpha}]$, from $\bar{o}\bar{\theta}$ to $\bar{\rho}\bar{\kappa}\zeta$, and from $\bar{\rho}\bar{\kappa}\theta$ to $\bar{\rho}\bar{m}$ allows the conclusion that the ms originally had at least 70 folios.

¹⁰ BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*, p. lxi. However, no trace of the latter can be found in the ms today. Fourteen years after Budge's edition, A. VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d'Égypte*, 2 vols, Louvain, 1929, I, p. 82 could not find any trace either and suggested that the ms may never have included such a date (= VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Colophons*). I must express a reservation with regard to this suggestion, since the ms. is seriously damaged in this section, and I cannot see why Budge would invent such a date.

¹¹ See VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Colophons* II, p. 205.

¹² Even if palaeographically possible, these dates create some problems. In another ms (Or 7022), partly by the same copyist, and clearly dated to AD 981, Joseph signs himself as 'the humble deacon Ἰωσφ , son of the late archdeacon Σισίννιος (see VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Colophons* II, p. 184-187 and LAYTON, *Catalogue*, p. 166). The omission in Or 7023 of references to his father's death and, especially, his silence concerning his rank, suggest that Or 7023 is earlier than Or 7022. This latter possibility is further supported by the fact that the most likely reading of the colophon's date is $\tau\mu\theta$ (349). See also TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten* II, p. 866.

¹³ The difference between these and Budge's measurements (31.5cm x 24.5 cm) is due to the fact that some folios (7 and 38) have been inlaid and the others re-margined, in paper.

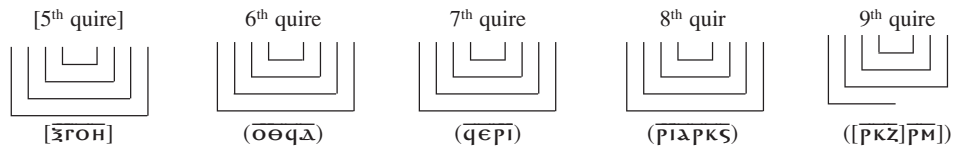
¹⁴ The number of folios is also different. A handwritten note at the bottom of f. 37b, however, shows that originally the number of folios was 37. F. 38 is an extraneous parchment folio added later at the end of the ms. According to LAYTON (*Catalogue*, 186), it might have been extracted from the ancient boards of the ms itself, as in mss LAYTON 143, 161, and 162.



ternion, the second quire and the remaining ms could follow the first without irregularities¹⁷.

According to this hypothesis, the *discourse on the archangel Raphael* occupied the first 62 pages.

The *ApPaul* occupied the 5 remaining quires, of which only the first, covering pages $\overline{\text{ΞΓΟΗ}}$, is lost. Then follow the three remaining complete quaternions covering pages $\overline{\text{ΟΘ}}$ to $\overline{\text{ΠΣ}}$ and the incomplete one covering pages $\overline{\text{ΠΚΘ}}$ to $\overline{\text{ΠΜ}}$. Given that the text ends in the seventh folio of the last quire, its eighth folio was either a copyist's blank or was absent from the beginning. The latter possibility would easily explain the loss of its first folio (p. $\overline{\text{ΠΚΖ}}$ and $\overline{\text{ΠΚΗ}}$), for only an unstable stub would have held it. The hypothetical original structure is the following:



According to this hypothesis, the *ApPaul* began at page $\overline{\text{ΞΓ}}$ of the Coptic pagination and filled the following 78 pages until $\overline{\text{ΠΜ}}$. Nowadays we have 60 pages of text. Given the fact that the lost first quire consisted of 16 pages, one may conclude that after the current beginning there is only one single minor lacuna of 2 pages.

4. The problems with Budge's edition

A number of facts show that the *editio princeps* was not as carefully realised as one might have expected. Firstly, as stated above, Budge did not appreciate that the four folios of ms. Or 6806A were actually the remains of the second quire of ms. Or 7023.

Secondly, he seems to have misunderstood the signature of the quires. Probably not realising that signatures appear on the first and last folio of every quire, he understands the Coptic number $\overline{\text{ΙΔ}}$ as an ordinal indicating quire n° fourteenth and consequently considers our ms the second of a series¹⁸.

¹⁷ This contravention of the law of Gregory might be due to Byzantine influence. Nevertheless it is clear that, given the poor quality of the parchment and the obvious artistic intentions behind the title, only the flesh side could provide a suitable surface for the yellow and red serpent-like motif that frames the title on three of its sides (above, below, and in the left inner margin).

¹⁸ BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*, p. lix.



onstrated the absence of other *lacunae*, in a future study I shall argue that the Coptic version of the *APPaul* is essential both as a touchstone for the study of the Tarsus-text and for the reconstruction of the Pre-Tarsus Greek original.

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Abstract — Ms. Or 7023 contains the only extant copy of the Coptic version of the *Apocalypse of Paul*. In spite of its quality and interest for the reconstruction of the primitive text, there seems to be consensus among scholars in considering our text a rather amplifying or inferior version of *ApPaul*. This erroneous view is due to the numerous and important errors in Budge's *editio princeps*, which gives both distorted impression of the text's length and an incorrect assessment of the number and extension of internal *lacunae*. On the basis of a codicological analysis of Ms. Or 7023, the present article shows that, excluding the missing first quaternion, the ms only has a single lacuna of one folio.

²⁰ BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*, p. 534-574: at 534, 556 566, respectively.

²¹ BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Texts*, p. 1043-1084: at 1076.